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Fire Officials Warn of Extreme Risk of Brush Fires
Ask for Public's Help

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan, Acting State Fire Warden Philip S. Gilmore and Chief David A. LaFond, president of the Fire Chiefs' Association of Massachusetts, today issued a warning about the extreme risk of brush fires. Coan said, "We are asking for the public's help in preventing brush fires these next few days by being careful with outdoor cooking, use of recreational vehicles, and carefully disposing of all smoking materials."

Issuing of Open Burning Permits Suspended

Fire Warden Gilmore said, "The National Weather Service has issued a fire weather watch for most of Massachusetts due to the extremely dry, hot and windy conditions over the next several days. Due to these unsafe conditions, state fire officials placed a ban on open burning permits." Massachusetts has experienced less than average rainfall amounts for April and no rain is forecast for several days.

The snow pack has melted but the trees have not leafed out, and the ground is dry and has not yet greened up with spring growth. The jet stream is changing in April, which can bring periods of heavy winds. Even if the winds start out calm early in the day, conditions can change suddenly and without warning.

Chief LaFond said, "The next few days are expected to be very hot, last year's leaves and dead grass is tinder dry, and with no canopy on the trees, the sun and wind suck every last drop of moisture out of the ground. These conditions have set the stage for an extreme risk for brush fires in our state."

Fire Officials Ask for Public's Cooperation

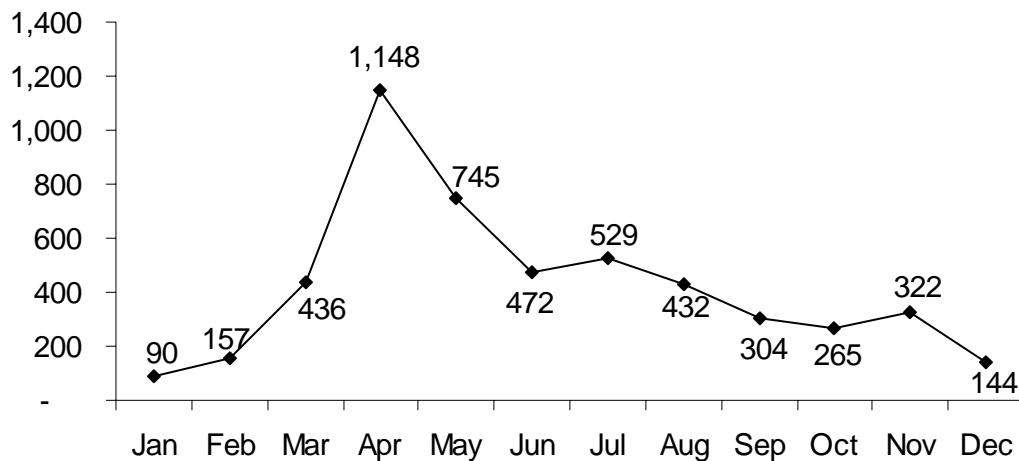
Fire officials are asking for the public's cooperation. Gilmore said, "Every year people wait till the last minute to do their open burning and run the risk of conditions being unsafe to do so as they are now. We ask for the public's cooperation and patience."

Brush Fires Tax Firefighting Resources

LaFond said, “Brush fires take a lot of time and manpower to bring under control and multiple brush fires can severely tax our firefighting resources. Prevention is the best approach.”

According to the Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS), in 2003 there were 2,981 natural vegetation fires (trees, grass, and brush fires) which caused one civilian death, five civilian injuries, 14 firefighter injuries, and an estimated dollar loss of \$371,878. Twice as many brush fires occur in April as any other month. MFIRS is managed by the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

**Average Number of Reported Brush Fires
1995 - 2004**



Illegal to Throw Cigarettes Out Car Window

The improper disposal of smoking materials has been a major problem to the fire service for years. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 148 Section 54 states, “Whoever drops or throws from any vehicle while the same is upon a public or private way running along or near forest land or open fields, or, except as permitted by law, drops, throws, deposits or otherwise places in or upon forest land, any lighted cigarette, cigar, match, live ashes or other flaming or glowing substance, or any substance or thing which in and of itself is likely to cause a fire, shall be punished by a fine of not more than one hundred dollars or by imprisonment for not more than thirty days. Coan said, “A single carelessly discarded cigarette butt under today’s conditions could ignite a major catastrophe.”

For more information on fire safety see the Department of Fire Services webpage at www.mass.gov/dfs or the Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Bureau of Fire Control at www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/firecont.

